



## A YULETIDE TALE FOR THE GIRLS AND BOYS.

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Marion's fingers were blue with cold when she had finished making the beds. Uncle James' house was an old fashioned country dwelling without anything of the nature of a heater in it. There was a good fire down stairs in the dining room and one in the great square kitchen behind it, but a fire in a bedroom was a luxury unknown to the Croftroads unless in cases of sickness.

Happily none of the Croftroads were ill at present. Indeed, to judge by the rollicking noise the young folks were making in the dining room, it was evident that the opposite condition prevailed to an almost alarming extent. At Stony Creek the school holidays



"TAKE IT, AND WELCOME," SHE SAID. Isted from the week before Christmas to New Year's, and the young Croftroads were therefore enjoying their midwinter vacation.

"Jack, you and Jim behave yourselves," called their mother from the kitchen. "And you, Jo, quit making such a noise. And you, Cathie and Matilda, get to your knitting."

There was a sharp note in Mrs. Croftroad's tones; but, on the whole, her "scolding" was not very severe. Still, to Marion's ears, unaccustomed to harsh words and equally a stranger to the noisy, rough ways of her cousins, the scene down stairs in the "living rooms" of the house was anything but pleasant.

"No; I won't go down stairs," thought Marion as the vociferous shouts broke out afresh. "They would only tease me."

The thought of Christmas coming tomorrow did not make Marion happy. Last Christmas she had had her own sweet mother. What a change this was from the happy, peaceful home life with mamma! The sudden death of her mother in the spring had left her an orphan with no means for her support.

"What shall be done with Marion?" was the question that the relatives had discussed all summer. Aunt Patience did not want the little girl at first. "As if I hadn't enough of my own!" she said in her noisily aggressive way. "If she was big and strong, I wouldn't care so much, for then she could help with the hard work and earn her board and clothes, but she's such a spindling, delicate little thing and all spoiled with petting."

Although Marion was little, she was past 13, and she realized, with many a keen pang of grief and humiliation, what it was to be unloved and poor and homeless when it was finally decided that she must either be sent to an orphan asylum or go to Uncle James' in the country. Aunt Patience yielded. "Oh, well," she said, "I guess one more in the family won't matter much."

Early in the autumn Marion had been very ill with fever. One of the results of this sickness was a peculiar tendency to fall asleep at odd hours of the day. The doctor said that as soon as she had recovered from the "dregs" of the disease she would be well again and that her relatives need not be alarmed. Marion always felt better after these daylight slumbers, which brought the roses back to her cheeks and made her feel strong. But the habit afforded her cousins a great opportunity for teasing. Often she would awaken on the dining room sofa to find them all laughing at her and making remarks not at all complimentary or kind. In their still more mischievous moods the boys, and even Cathie and Matilda, would sometimes tickle her face while she slept, saying, "Red head, sleepy head, go to bed."

Naturally Marion grew to dread the presence of her cousins when she felt herself becoming sleepy. Strictly speaking, her hair was not red, but a beautiful shade of auburn. Aunt Patience presently called up the stairs, "Ain't you got the beds made yet, Marion?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Marion. Her voice trembled, for she was crying.

"Then don't stay moping up there in

the cold, or the first thing you'll be falling asleep."

The little girl tried hastily to hide the traces of her tears, but her eyes were red when she came into the dining room.

"What's the matter, Mary Ann?" asked Jim.

Marion disliked to be called "Mary Ann," and she did not answer.

"Been napping already this morning, Mary Ann?" asked Jack.

"Say, Mary Ann, Mary Ann!" continued Cathie.

"I would thank you to call me by my proper name," said Marion when she could endure the teasing no longer. "You know well enough that my name is not Mary Ann."

"Marion, your hair is awful red when the sun shines on it," said Matilda. "You can't deny it. I'll get you my hand mirror."

"I don't want your hand mirror," said Marion.

One of the boys now said "Reddy!" and the new nickname was repeated amid shouts of laughter.

The cousins did not really intend to be unkind, but they loved to tease. When Aunt Patience was tired of the noise, she came bustling in from the kitchen with her sleeves rolled up. "Be still, every one of you!" she said sharply. "It's enough to make a body wish there was no Christmas, the way you carry on. Here, you, Jim and Jack! Go right out and shovel the snow off the road to the gate. And you, Jo, go into the woodhouse and cut kindling. And you, Tillie and Cathie, go dust the parlor furniture."

This command left Marion alone in the dining room. Soon she found herself nodding over her sewing. "Oh, dear!" she thought. "I wish I didn't get these sleepy spells! The boys will soon be coming in. Oh, for some place to go and sleep quietly!"

She looked at the big sofa, which was a sofa bed of the kind that folds back. Marion noticed a shelf underneath the cushioned springs. Evidently this was intended to be utilized as a place to keep bedding. The shelf was empty, however, save for a little pillow and an old shawl, and a width of lining cloth hung from the top, concealing the opening. The contrivance reminded Marion of a berth in a sleeping car, and she had a sudden inspiration to creep into the cunning little retreat and take her nap unseen, and so escape molestation.

Aunt Patience was hard at work in the kitchen preparing for Christmas when a rap at the door announced a stranger.

"Good morning, madam," said a pleasant voice that seemed to suit the amiable, cheery face partially muffled in a sealskin cap. "Have you any old furniture to sell? It's my business to buy old articles that are in demand, renew them in my shop in town and sell them as antiques." The man handed Mrs. Croftroad a business card on which was printed, "Cassius Quinette, Dealer in Antique Furniture."

"Well," said Aunt Patience, showing the man into the dining room, "I don't care if you make an 'antique' out of that old sofa. It's only a romping place for the children, and they've got the cloth nearly all torn off it."

"Yes, I see," smiled the man good naturedly. He gave the springs of the sofa a downward press with his hands, examined the mahogany veneering and then offered Mrs. Croftroad a sum of money that made her smile.

"Take it, and welcome," she said, glad to be rid of what was to her an eyesore and a nuisance.

With the help of Jim and Jack the sofa was presently loaded on the wagon of the purchaser, and directly Mr. Cassius Quinette was driving along the smooth white road to town, congratulating himself on his latest bargain. In the city Mr. Quinette and his wife occupied the dwelling part of the house over the store and workroom. They had their living apartments arranged very cozily, for they both had good taste and plenty of means to gratify it.

"Oh, yes, I have every comfort and luxury," Mrs. Quinette would acknowledge when her friends expressed admiration for her beautiful home, "but I often wish that there was some young person in the house to call me mother."

Mrs. Quinette was in one of these wistful states of mind on this particular December day. As she looked out of the window she could see the people on the street carrying home their Christmas bundles, and she thought to herself: "Ah, me, if I only had a daughter for her! And I would have a Christmas tree for her even if she were a big girl of 16!"

Presently she heard her husband's step on the stairs. He came into the parlor smiling. "Come down to the shop, my dear, and see what I brought home. I think I will clear \$20 on it."

"Oh, I would rather have some one to spend the money on!" sighed Mrs. Quinette as she followed him.

"Won't it look fine when I get it done up in oriental brocade?" said Mr. Quinette.

The lady had seated herself on the old sofa, but she sprang up quickly, with a startled look. "There's something in it—living!"

"My dear, you are dreaming!"

But just then the "dream" realized. Up went the hanging curtain at the back of the sofa, and out stepped a trim little rosy cheeked maiden.

The sun shining on the auburn hair, which was a little tossed over the pure white forehead, made a halo, and Mrs. Quinette thought for a moment that it was too lovely a picture of sweet girlhood to be real. Was it a miracle or a delusion of the senses? Even Mr. Quinette, sensible business man that he was, stood speechless with surprise. Many strange things he had found in old sofas—rings and trinkets and coins and nameless curios—but never before a live little girl!

As will be imagined, Marion was not a little surprised too. Looking into the strange faces, she perceived that both were kindly and instinctively felt that she was safe.

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"Thank you. It would be a present that I would like," smiled the lady.

"But," she added, "perhaps the little girl's relatives are distracted trying to find her. Cassius, go right back and tell them that she's safe and ask them to let her stay with us until after Christmas. Wouldn't you like to stay, dear?"

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